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Natural Areas Newsletter

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Natural Areas in Alberta!

Issue 16

October 1991

Naturally Yours

The Natural Areas Program is sponsored by Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife

Reflections On Our Roots

by Peter Achuff

the first Natural Areas Coordinator

Bellis, the first Natural Area.

My involvement with Natural Areas in Alberta began as the Alberta Coordinator for the conservation panel of the Canadian part of the International Biological Program (IBP-CT), which primarily involved the scientific research community.

Among other activities between 1968 and 1974, IBP-CT surveyed and prepared check sheets on 147 areas in Alberta that were valuable for biological conservation. At the same time, a Natural Areas Committee, composed of staff in the then Alberta Department of Lands and Forests, was planning for a system of outstanding Natural Areas in Alberta. The two groups quickly recognized their similarity of purpose and, as the IBP-CT Regional Coordinator, I was invited to participate in the committee, providing a liaison with the information and scientific knowledge of IBP-CT.

In early 1974, the Natural Areas Committee received approval for a Natural Areas Coordinator position and was requested to write a detailed job description so the position could be classified and advertised in late spring. I contributed the IBP-CT Alberta Coordinator's job description to the process and the final description contained much from that. At the time, I was teaching at the University of Alberta. When the position was advertised a few months later and I was the successful candidate for the job, I decided to leave the university. Thus unwittingly, I ended up in a job for which I had had a large hand in defining and in writing the description.

IBP-CT ended in 1974 and was succeeded in Alberta by the Alberta Ecological Survey (AES). Over the next three years, the Natural Areas program and AES worked closely both in surveying and evaluating additional areas, and in developing policy and proposed legislation. From a total of about 900 suggested areas drawn from AES and Alberta government files, approximately 700 were surveyed, and roughly 400 contained sufficiently significant features to be checksheeted and considered for inclusion in a Natural Areas/Ecological Reserves system for Alberta. Initially, much effort went into establishing a manual file information system (computerized information systems were still over the horizon) to be able to respond quickly to land use referrals and select high priority areas for the provincial system plan.

A draft policy on Natural Areas and ecological reserves, including a skeletal, master system plan, was prepared and circulated to various agencies. Proposed legislative changes were also prepared, reviewed, revised, etc. This process culminated in the amendments to the *Wilderness Areas Act* in 1984 which saw Ecological Reserves split off to Alberta Recreation and Parks with Natural Areas remaining within what was then Alberta Energy and Natural Resources.

Many of the people hired as summer assistants, including Peter Lee, the current Natural Areas Manager, have remained in the conservation/Natural Areas field and people who gained experience with the Alberta Natural Areas program are now active in conservation all across North America.❑

Highlights

1971

- Bellis, east of Smoky Lake, is established as the first Order-in-Council Natural Area under the *Public Lands Act.*
- A total of 76 Natural Areas were established, totalling 22 399 ha.

1974

- Natural Areas Program is established. The first coordinator, Peter Achuff, is hired.
- First Natural Areas land acquisition (Wagner and J.J. Collett).

1981

- *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act* is proclaimed.

1987

- As part of the centennial year of conservation in Canada, the Alberta government makes a commitment to establish 100 new Natural Areas.
- 24 new sites are designated. These include the largest (Beehive at 5662 ha) and the 100th (Milk River) areas.
- Volunteer Steward Program, to enlist the aid of the public in the conservation of Natural Areas, is initiated.
- First water licence for conservation reasons is approved for Wagner Natural Area.

1990

- Natural Areas Section of the Public Lands Division is created.
- First Volunteer Steward Conference is held, attracting over 100 participants.
- First conservation easement is acquired.

1991

- 118 Natural Areas have been established, representing a total land area of 35 585 ha.
- 154 sites now under reservation, accounting for another 80 498 ha as of September 1, 1991.❑

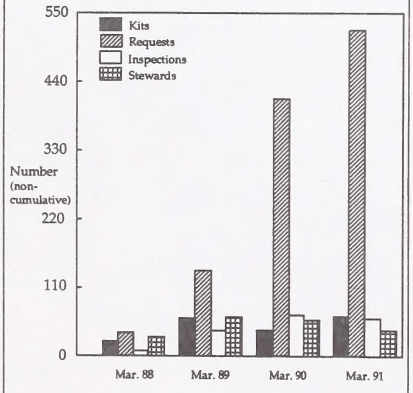
From our stewards . . .

During the 20-year history of the Natural Areas program there have been some rather unusual discoveries on the sites. Dorothy Dickson and Carol Smith are two stewards who have agreed to share their memories with you.

Status of Volunteer Steward Program 1990-91

Number of Volunteer Stewards:	
Individuals	152
Groups	50
Total	202
Number of Natural Areas:	
Order-in-Council (OC)	118
Candidate	151
Total	269
Number of Natural Areas available for the Steward Program:	
Order-in-Council (OC)	114
Reserved	89
Total	203
Number of sites with stewards:	
Order-in-Council (OC)	77
Candidate	59
Total	136
Number of sites with one steward:	84
Number of sites with two stewards:	47
Number of sites with a volunteer management committee:	5
Available sites without stewards:	67

Yearly comparison of the number of kits, requests inspection reports submitted and new stewards.



This information summarizes the current status of the Volunteer Steward Program and is taken from *The Volunteer Steward Program Second Annual Report, April 1, 1990 -- March 30, 1991.* For your copy of the report, contact program staff at 427-5209.❑

The Ant-Hill Mystery

Dorothy Dickson
Innisfail Natural Area

There are anthills on my Natural Area. These hills, varying from 30 - 60 cm high, weren't of special interest until I noticed that many of them appeared to have an angled slice cut from the top. Was this a rare species of ant that built lopsided homes?

Entomologist friends and books were no help. A sunny, fall day after a light snowfall provided a clue. The sloping face of each snow-covered mound was bare and I realized they all faced one way -- south. Was this to raise the internal temperature of the anthill?

On another sunny, but colder day, the deep snow was certainly thinner on the angled south side of the first hill I examined. As I approached a second mound, the patch of snow on its sloped top leapt off and scurried into the willows. Examining other mounds through binoculars, I found several where an anxious black eye watched me from the pile of "snow" crouched on its sunny slope.

Leaving the snowshoe hares to enjoy their home-made "sun-parlours", I laughingly turned my own snowshoes for home. So much for exotic ants!❑

How Chest Wader Pond Got Its Name

Carol Smith
North Cooking Lake Natural Area

I will never forget the night I lost my husband's chest waders in an attempt to photograph a sora nest, a species of rail, at the North Cooking Lake Natural Area. During an earlier hike, the nest was discovered on a small slough that would catch the light of the setting sun. The rails did not appear to be unduly disturbed by my first visit so I decided to return with my camera and tripod to set up in the pond, while wearing my husband's chest waders. The pond was a small body of water and could not possibly be very deep.

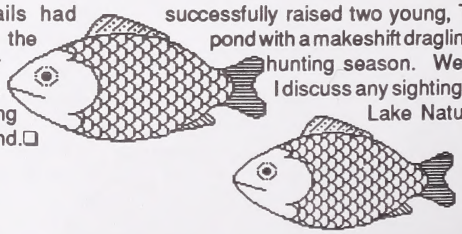
I and Tassie, my faithful dog, arrived at the Natural Area at approximately 9:00 p.m. on that warm, July evening. Tassie and I set out at a quick pace to hike the one quarter of a kilometre distance to the slough. Lugging the chest waders, camera and tripod was no easy job in the 30° Celsius heat. After locating the sora nest, just inside the sedges on the opposite side of the pond, I slipped into the chest waders and proceeded into the water.

What a picture I must have made, balancing pole in one hand, camera and tripod in the other, high over my head. Immediately, I realized the water was cool, even after several days of very warm air temperatures. My decision to go directly across the middle of the pond instead of manoeuvering along the muddy, sedge-choked shoreline proved to be my undoing.

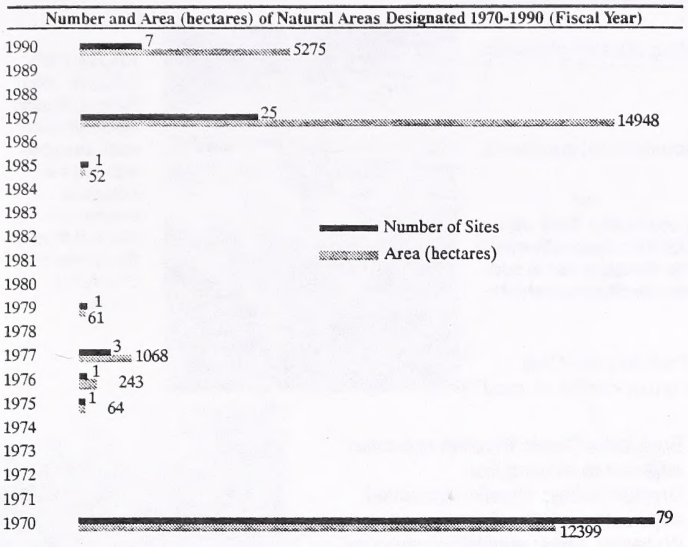
The first step took me into water up to my waist. It was such a small pond! The next, smaller step was the same. Using the balancing pole, I attempted to gauge the depth of the water when what felt to be the bottom simply began to sink. My feet would not budge because they were embedded in the muck. My life did not pass before my eyes, but keeping the camera dry was certainly uppermost in my mind. I also recalled the various creatures I had encountered in pond studies. Yuck! After I recovered from the initial shock of cold water flowing into my husband's chest waders, I undid the shoulder straps to swim out.

As I swam to shore I could see the sora sitting indifferently on her nest. Retrieving my pole, I dragged the area where I felt the chest waders should be. After several attempts, I called it quits and started the soggy trek home with Tassie. Needless to say, I received no sympathy from my husband, after I explained I had lost his chest waders.

Weeks later, once the rails had successfully raised two young, Tassie, my husband and I returned to the pond with a makeshift dragline to rescue his chest waders in time for hunting season. We never did find them! To this day, when I discuss any sightings at or near that slough in the North Cooking Lake Natural Area, I refer to it as Chest Wader Pond.❑



More Reflections



by Peter Lee
Natural Areas Manager

My involvement with Natural Areas began in 1975 when I was a summer employee.

After one short summer when I inventoried such incredible places as the Caribou Mountains, Porcupine Hills, Wilmore Wilderness Park, Athabasca Sand Dunes and Peace River, I was "hooked" for my professional career!

Diane Griffin, now a well-known conservationist throughout Canada, became the Natural Areas Coordinator following Peter Achuff. She hired five of the staff now working in the section — Lorna Allen, Joyce Gould, Sandy Myers, John Rintoul and myself. This small group has been complemented by the more recent additions of Bill Richards, Donna Knutson and Marina Walters. When Diane left to pursue other opportunities, I became coordinator and then manager.

The 1980-90 decade saw the program change.

It was relatively unknown at the beginning with a strong land base of some outstanding sites and has now evolved into a program with a high public and agency profile and an increased land base of many more outstanding sites. During this time, some of Alberta's biological "crown jewels" were added to the program.

Higher profile for the program was the result of greatly accelerated public interest in the environment and our program's proactive public involvement initiatives.

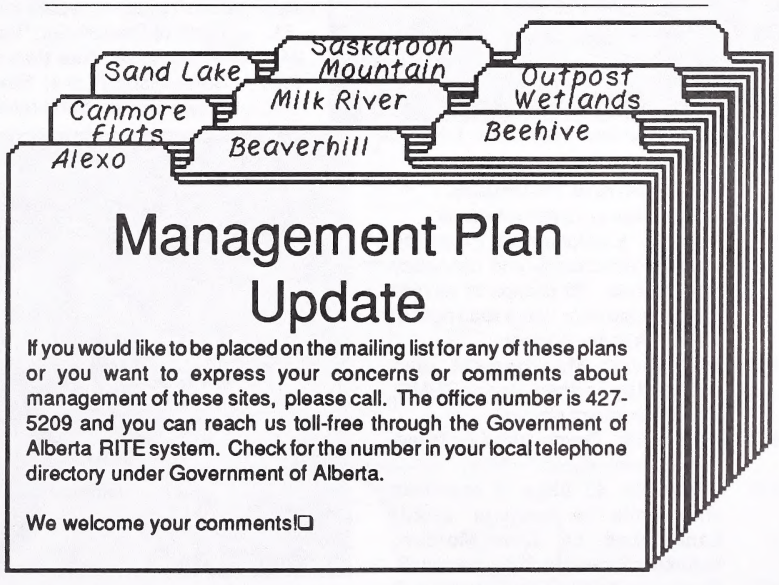
We encourage media contact, make public presentations, and produce numerous communication products — site brochures, fact sheets, information papers, audio-visual shows and displays, site trail guides and species checklists — to support the message of the program. The most successful and popular venture has been the Volunteer Steward Program.

As interest in Natural Areas grows, program staff have become involved in clarifying many policy issues and addressing site-specific management and operational concerns. In some cases, they have prepared detailed site management plans. Increased attention has also resulted in the department's regional staff and other agencies taking a more active role in assuming operational responsibilities for sites in their regions.

What will the '90s bring?

There will be enormous challenges and opportunities for the Natural Areas Program. Every indication is that strong public support will continue and necessitate further clarification of primary and secondary policy issues, including reconciliation of Natural Areas with other conservation initiatives. New sites will continue to be established and the management activities of existing sites will intensify.❑

Note: Graph is from the *Natural and Protected Areas Section 1990/91 Annual Report.* For your copy, call the program staff at 427-5209.


Sand Lake
Saskatoon Mountain
Outpost Wetlands
Canmore Flats
Milk River
Beehive
Alexo
Beaverhill
Management Plan Update
If you would like to be placed on the mailing list for any of these plans or you want to express your concerns or comments about management of these sites, please call. The office number is 427-5209 and you can reach us toll-free through the Government of Alberta RITE system. Check for the number in your local telephone directory under Government of Alberta.
We welcome your comments!❑

Site Activities

April 1, 1991 - August 31, 1991

A regular feature to keep volunteer stewards and interested individuals informed of activities occurring on our sites. Please consult the map for site locations.

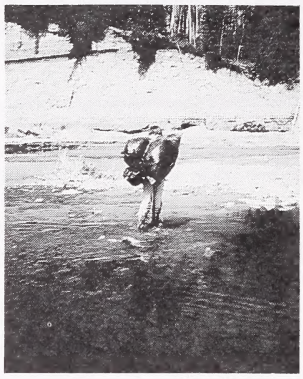
New Reservations

19. Debolt: A quarter section of land was added to the existing site along Kleskun Creek; minor boundary changes to 2 other quarters.
26. Sand Lake: Section of land added to existing site.
342. Tripoli Ridge: 5300 ha at Cardinal River headwaters.
528. Whitecourt Mountain: 558 ha centered on summit of mountain just southwest of Whitecourt.

Authorized Activities

Applications for dispositions on or for use of Natural Areas are only approved if there will be minimal impact on the natural features of the site. In some situations, subsurface leases/licences for petroleum and natural gas were issued before establishment of the Natural Area. In such situations, surface rights to access the resource are accommodated with conditions attached to minimize the impacts.

38. Sounding Lake: Pipeline approved.
71. North of Bruderheim: Safari hunt held by Sherwood Park Archery Club.
145. J.J. Collett: Letter of Authority issued to County for brush control at road intersection at SE corner of site.



ABOVE AND BELOW: John Rintoul, Natural Areas program staff, struggles with bags of scentless chamomile plucked from the banks of Stawberry Creek.

290. Buck Lake Creek: Pipeline approved adjacent to existing line.
304. Drayton Valley: Pipeline approved adjacent to existing line.
360. Wahstao: Meter station approved on existing pipeline; fire-killed pine removed by permit.
363. Bellis: County recreation lease boundary amended.
420. Saskatoon Mountain: Application for rifle range deferred; dugout on portion under grazing lease approved.
432. Pine Sands: Easement approved for drilling of test holes; clearing underway for road right-of-way.
468. O'Chiese: Total of 1.6 km of seismic line approved along existing line.
510. Town Creek: Seismic program approved on existing lines.
519. Tawatinaw: Seismic program rejected.

Don Morden, Volunteer Steward for Telfordville Natural Area.

Unauthorized Activities

These activities occur randomly; prompt notification allows our program to monitor the situation and implement corrective measures if required.

71. North of Bruderheim: Vandalism - signs damaged, fences cut.
241. Sylvan Lake: New trails built.
396. Spruce Island Lake: Sewage dumped.
44. Edson South: Sand removed.

Management Activities

Activities undertaken by staff or volunteers.

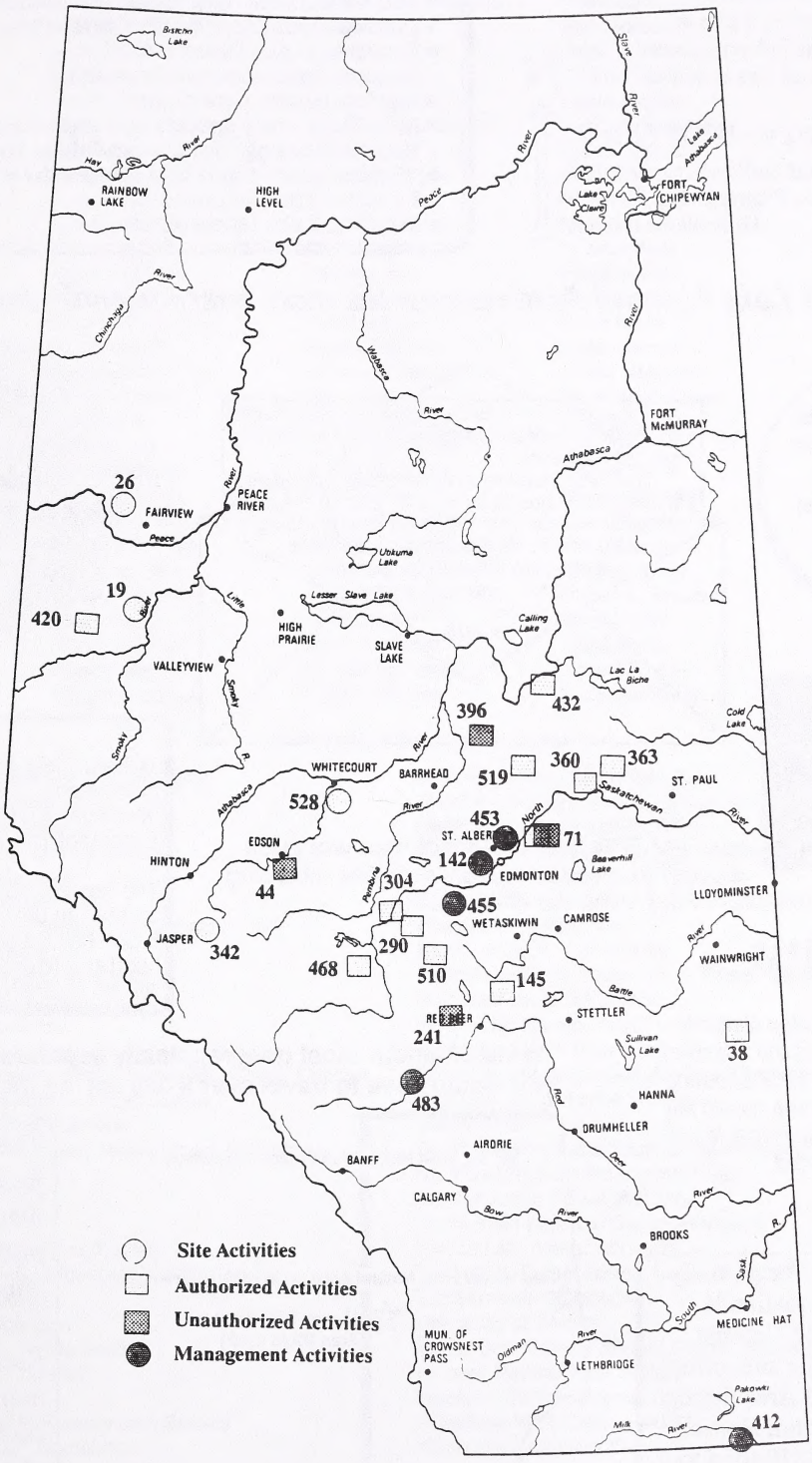
142. Wagner: Environmental Protection Plan for interchange and connector road drafted. 20 clumps of orchids transplanted from future road right of way by Wagner Society.
412. Milk River: Management plan endorsed by Southern Region RRMC; Grazing contract signed.
453. Riverlot 56: Coyote killed by bylaw enforcement officer.
455. Telfordville: 43 bags of scentless chamomile (a noxious weed) handpicked by Don Morden, Volunteer Steward and program staff.
483. Sundre North: Cleanup completed.❑

With the last of 43 bags of scentless chamomile in hand, Don and John end three days of handpicking.

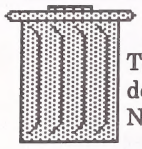
A regular feature to keep volunteer stewards and interested individuals informed of activities occurring on our sites. Please consult the information on the opposite page for site activities.

Site Activities

April 1, 1991 - August 29, 1991



Alberta's Natural Areas have it all!
Here are some amazing but true facts.



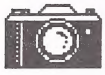
Terrible Trash!!
The ugliest litter, a pile of dead pigs, was left on Nestow Natural Area.

Believe It Or Not !!!
You'll find badlands as far north as Grande Prairie in the Kleskun Hills Natural Area.

N

Some biophysically significant Natural Areas

- Red Rock Coulee (large spherical boulders)
- Plateau Mountain (ice cave with crystals)
- Beaverhill Lake (waterfowl)
- Genesee (paleobotanical fossils)
- Big Sagebrush (rare plants)
- Milk River (rare species and undisturbed grasslands)
- Holmes Crossing (unique sand dune formation)
- Wagner (marl ponds and species diversity)
- La Saline (tufa deposits)
- Kimiwan Lake (shorebirds)



Beaverhill Lake Natural Area receives the most international tourists.

One of the newest Natural Areas under consideration is at Alberta's official geographical centrepoint -- located north of Fort Assiniboine.

The most controversial site to be established was Milk River Natural Area because of conflicting land use interests.
The most publicly controversial site since establishment has been Wagner due to the road expansion issue. Over 200 letters expressing support for this Natural Area were received by the Alberta government, many coming from other countries.

Big Sagebrush Natural Area, located south of Crowsnest, contains the most rare plant species; 10 national and 22 provincial.

Plateau Mountain Natural Area is world-famous for ice crystals (like huge snowflakes) found hanging from ceilings of caverns.

Redwater Natural Area was once used for military activities, including the use of explosives.

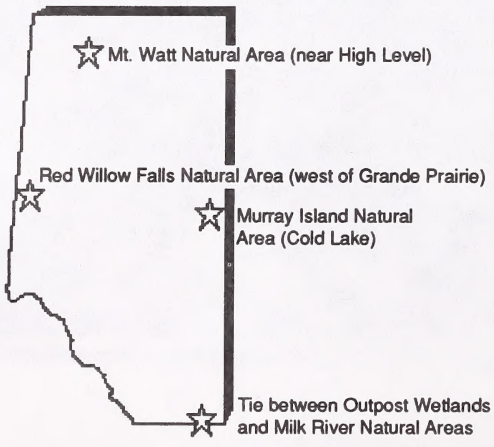
The smallest Natural Area, Antler Lake Island, is located just east of Sherwood Park. This one ha site is important for nesting birds.

The largest Natural Area, Beehive, located on the Continental divide is a 5 662 ha site of alpine and subalpine habitat, old growth forest and is noted for its diversity of large mammals.

dID yoU knOW...

In 1927, White Earth Valley Natural Area (near Thorhild) was the scene of a crime. A man convicted of shooting a beaver was given a three month jail sentence because it was illegal to kill beavers (due to decimated populations).

To visit the four most geographically separated Natural Areas, you would have to travel over 3 000 km 'as the crow flies'.


Mt. Watt Natural Area (near High Level)
Red Willow Falls Natural Area (west of Grande Prairie)
Murray Island Natural Area (Cold Lake)
Tie between Outpost Wetlands and Milk River Natural Areas

The first Natural Area to be partially used for commercial recreation is Halfmoon Lake. Richard DeSmet, Volunteer Steward for the site, offers trail rides on the Natural Area through his company, Landing Trail House. Phone Richard @ 961-3370 for a tour.

The "worst" person found hiding on a Natural Area was a murderer. It happened in 1988 when a Volunteer Steward found the man, who was later charged and convicted of murder, in Wagner Natural Area.

Thank you . . .to all our volunteers — past and present!

Volunteer Stewards from 1987 - 1991

Individuals

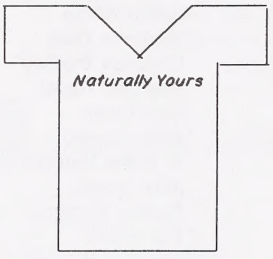
Desmond Allen
James Allen
Vicki Allers
Debbie Armstrong
Brad Arner
Elmar Augart
Omar Azim
Eric Bailey
Ed Baker
Evelena Baker
Brian A. Barr
Karen Bennett
Laurie J. Berger-Porter
Casey Bizon
Bjorge family
Ted Blowers
Alex Bolton
Gerald Borden
Linda Borden
Mary Bosiak
Brian Breneman
Bill Bresnahan
Connie Bresnahan
Mattie Brown
Sean Brown
Stephen Burk
Chris Butler
Doris Cairns
Earl Cairns
June Campbell
Wayne Campbell
Mike Cantle
Jim Christie
Ray Cromie
Susan Crump
Merrel Dahlgren
Michele Deakin
Earl Dicknoether
David Dolph
David Doze
David Dyjur
Robert Faulds
E. J. Foley
Richard Forsberg
Ken Froggatt
Laura Froggatt
Jean Funk
Gordon Galarneau
Bob Gerlock
Michael Glossop
Robert Gouin
Ray Gould
Alice Gould
Tony Graham
Reginald Gray
Deirdre Griffiths
Roger Hamilton
David Hanam
Susan Harrison
Allan Haskin
Arlene Haskin
Wayne Hawker
Margot Hervieux
Doris Hopkins
Eric Hopkins
Helmut Hugelschaffer
Jim Jobe
Lee Jobe
Jon Jorgenson
Robert Kabatoff
Mike Kamelchuk
Rose Keiller
W. Gordon Kerr
Doug Kielau
Chuck Knutson
Cecil Knuttila
Jennifer Kot
Jim Lange
Ken Larsen
Robin Lawless
Valerie Lidford
Bob Loewen
Doreen Loewen
Gary Lukawesky
T. Kent Lukinuk
Mark Lund
Sheila MacLean
Chrisanna MacLeod
Howard MacPherson
Chel Macdonald
Allan Matile
Marilyn Matile
Locklin McDonald
Debbie McGee
Mike McNaughton
Jamie McNeil
Tom McPherson
Don Morden
John G. Morrison
Andrew Murphy
Elena Napora
Craig A. Newman
Grant Nieman
Ken O'Brien
Maxine O'Riordan
Norman J. Parkin
R. Don Peel
Fordyce Pier
Partick Porter
Kerry Rees
Carol Ritchie
Judith Samson
Dr. Robert Scace
Fred Schutz
Rick Scott
Robert Scott
Morris Shandro
Mark Sherrington
Ivan Shukster
Skelley family
Donna L. Smecko
Barb Smith
Carol Smith
Darrell Smith
K. JoAnn Smith
Fred Sproule
Jeanne Sproule
Patricia Stansfield
Robert Stefonini
Frank Talaber
Rita Talaber
Hubert Taube
Janis Thorkelsson
Walter Tostyniuk
Gordon Trost
Shannon Trost
Clarence Truckey
Francois Trudel
Rob Turner
Sally Turner
H. Pieter Van Der Schoot
John Vrolijk
Dianne Wahlund
Pat Walker
Anne Ward
Doug Ward
Anne Weerstra
Bryne Weerstra
Colin Wenger
Norma Whelan
Ian Whitby
Derry White
Ora White
Jay Wieliczko
Daryl Wig
Ken Yackimec

Groups/Clubs/Organizations

2716 Airborne Royal Canadian Army Cadets
Alberta Forestry Association
Alberta Native Plant Council
Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association
Alberta Wilderness Association
Barrhead Boy Scout Troup — 1st
Battle Lake Natural Area Preservation Society
Beaverhill Bird Observatory
Big Hill Blazers Junior Forest Wardens
Boy Scouts of Canada (Central)
Breakers Cottage Association
Bruderheim Natural Areas Society
Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists, Alberta Chapter
Caslan and District Development Association
Castledowns Junior Forest Wardens
Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary Management Committee
County of Lacombe
County of Strathcona
Cowley Forest Products
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
Debolt and District Pioneer Museum Society
Dunvegan Nordic Ski Club
Eagles Junior Forest Wardens
Fort Saskatchewan Naturalists Society
Girl Guides of Canada (Central)
J.J. Collett Foundation
Kimiwan Lake and Wildlife Preservation Society
Lac La Nonne Recreation Association
Lethbridge Naturalists Society
Ministik Lake Bird Sanctuary Society
Okotoks Junior Forest Wardens
Onoway and District Fish and Game Association and Gun Club
Peace River Junior Forest Wardens
Pembina River Fish and Game Association
Poacher's Landing Club
Rainbow Equitation Society
Ranchland Black Bears Junior Forest Wardens
Red Deer River Naturalists
Riverlot 56 Natural Area Society
Rocky Mountain House Boy Scouts
Sand Lake Management Advisory Committee
Sangudo Junior Forest Wardens
Sierra Club
South Cooking Lake Youth Support Association
St. Albert High Environmental Club
Stettler Junior Forest Wardens
Stony Plain Fish and Game Association
Sylvan Lake Venturers —1st
Torrington Timberwolves Junior Forest Wardens
Trout Unlimited Canada
University of Alberta
Upper Bow Valley Fish and Game Association
Wagner Natural Area Society
Western Walleye Council
Woodbine Wolf Cubs — 405th
Youth and Volunteer Centre

Return to:

Natural Areas Program
4th flr. 9915 - 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2C9



For a job well done!

At the First Volunteer Steward Conference, held in April of 1990, we gave T-shirts to all stewards who had been with the program for at least two years and fulfilled all requirements.

It is time once again to honour faithful volunteers with Volunteer Steward T-shirts. These individuals or groups have been stewards for two or more years and have tirelessly sent in inspection reports regularly for their sites. This year's recipients are:

Desmond Allen
Elmar Augart
David Dolph
Gordon Galarneau
Robert Gouin
Susan Harrison
Allan & Arlene Haskin
Wayne Hawker
Helmut Hugelschaffer
Doug Kielau
Lethbridge Naturalist Society
Don Mordon
Ken O'Brien
Norman Parkin
Sierra Club of Alberta
Clarence Truckey
Derry and Ora White

Thank you everyone for your hard work and dedication!❑

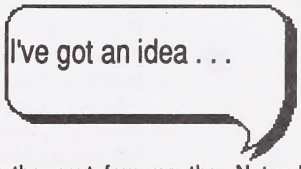
Coming Events

Wagner Natural Area Society Members' Night
October 10, 7:00 p.m.
This second annual event will be held at the Provincial Museum in Edmonton. Prepare for another evening filled with interesting slides, entertaining talks and guest speakers. Everybody is welcome and refreshments will be provided.

Edmonton Mycological Club
• Wednesday, November 6, 7:30 p.m.
Randy Currah will talk about his trip to Costa Rica.
Meetings are held at the University of Alberta, Medical Sciences Building, Room 2-27. For further information, please contact Norman Grimes (President) at 459-8955.

Symposium on Water, Energy and Waste Management in Alpine Shelters
October 27-28
This symposium, to be held at the Chateau Lake Louise, will bring together people interested in the installation and management of on-site energy and waste systems in remote alpine huts and areas. For further information contact Kevin Lohka at 762-4481 or by fax at 762-6312.

Third Prairie Conference and Endangered Species Workshop
February 14-16, 1992
Come and meet people who share your interest in prairie conservation. Be a part of the action in Brandon, Manitoba, and hear about success stories such as the yearly planting of hundreds of kilometres of new shelterbelts on the prairies and the plans underway for permanent cover in aid of soil and wildlife conservation. For further information, contact Geoff Holroyd at 438-1462 (evenings).❑



Over the next few months, Natural and Protected Areas will be developing a series of information papers and management plans on the following:

- fragmentation of habitats;
- grazing as a management tool on Natural Areas;
- how proposals for Natural Areas are referred; and
- petroleum and natural gas exploration and development activities on Natural Areas.

If you have any thoughts, concerns or comments on any of these topics, we would like to hear them. Write or call:

❑ Joyce Gould
• for grazing and fragmentation

❑ Lorna Allen
•for referrals and petroleum and natural gas activities.

Natural and Protected Areas
4th Fl., South Tower, Petroleum Plaza
9915 - 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2C9
(403) 427-5209❑

The new 1991 Provincial Natural Areas Map -- showing locations of all reserved and designated Natural Areas as of January 1991. Blueline copies are available (approximate size 130 cm x 85 cm) used with map supplement that lists all sites, legal description and status.❑

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